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IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 50/227

RESTRUCTURING AND REVITALIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND RELATED FIELDS

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report is in response to General Assembly resolution 50/227 of 24 May 1996, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on its implementation at the fifty-second session, through the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1997. The mandate, in Assembly resolution 45/264 of 13 May 1991, for an annual report of the Secretary-General on restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields is also subsumed in this report.

2. Section II of the report summarizes the recommendations with respect to the implementation of resolution 50/227 and provides information on efforts made by the Assembly and the Council on relevant provisions of the resolution. Section III focuses on the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

II. IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 50/227

A. Recommendations

3. The recommendations enumerated below are made in regard to various aspects of restructuring and revitalization in the economic, social and related fields. References are to annex I of resolution 50/227:

1. Funding of operational activities for development of the United Nations system

4. Action could be taken on the proposals contained in reports of the Secretary-General (A/48/940 and A/49/834 and others) on the funding of operational activities for development in the Assembly and the Council in accordance with their respective mandates.

5. A systematic review could be carried out on the discussions held in various forums on innovative funding sources that could be an additional element for the provision of resources for operational activities for development (para. 17).

2. General Assembly

6. Informal sessions could be encouraged in the form of an open interactive dialogue, including with non-governmental organizations. An assessment could be made as to whether these informal sessions should be held throughout the meetings of the Second and Third Committees, as done at the fifty-first session, or should be concentrated in the early parts of the work programme. Consideration needs to be given on how to finance the informal sessions (para. 19).

7. The possibilities of streamlining the programmes of work of the Second and Third Committees could be further explored. The Bureaux of the Second and Third Committees at the fifty-second session could draw lessons from the experiences of the two Bureaux of the fifty-first session (para. 21).

8. Greater efforts could be made to further streamline the texts of draft resolutions to make them more focused, concrete and operational. Submission of joint draft resolutions could be encouraged (para. 24).

9. To enrich and deepen the debate, rather than having a formal debate on each item on the agenda, consideration could be given to having discussions on a few urgent areas without excluding the possibility of submitting draft resolutions under the other agenda items (para. 27).

10. Consideration could be given to setting relatively short time limits for formal statements to allow for more dialogue among the delegations.

11. Consideration could be given to the scheduling of the resumed substantive session of the Council before the meetings of the Second and Third Committees in the fall to enable the Committees to carry out their sessions without interruption.

3. Documentation and related matters

12. Informal executive briefings could be held in accordance with Assembly resolution 50/227. The Bureau should, in consultation with the Committee, decide on the items for the executive briefings (para. 31).

13. Careful consideration needs to be given in requesting additional reports of the Secretary-General. Apart from restraint in requesting additional reports, further efforts could be made for an inventory of available information to avoid duplication (para. 34).

14. Decisions should be made on the recommendations put forth by the Secretary-General in his reports (A/50/697 and Corr.1, sect. F, and A/51/501, sect. C) on the simplification of existing reporting requirements, in particular, on the following, taking into account the reports that will be required for the follow-up to United Nations conferences (para. 35):

(a) Mandating the presentation of oral rather than written reports, particularly in regard to progress reports and reports that are presented on an annual basis;

(b) Encouraging the submission of a single "consolidated" report on related topics under a single item or sub-item of the agenda;

(c) Requesting the Secretariat to compile for the Council and for each of its subsidiary bodies a list of documents mandated in resolutions and decisions to be adopted at a given session in order to give members a clear picture of all documentation requested and to include in the report on the status of

documentation for a given session a list of all reports already mandated for the coming year;

(d) Making increased efforts at biennialization or triennialization of agenda items or sub-items. The Council and its subsidiary bodies should consider if, in fact, the majority of agenda items need to be examined on an annual basis.

4. Economic and Social Council

15. The consideration of poverty issues on the basis of the report of the Secretary-General (E/1996/61), which lead to the Council's Agreed Conclusions 1996/1, was considered useful. Similar consideration could be given to other cross-sectoral themes to ensure harmonization and coordination of the agendas and work programmes of the functional commissions. The Council may also wish to make recommendations for further implementation of the recommendations in paragraph 39 of Assembly resolution 50/227 (para. 39).

16. The Council will undertake consultations on the theme for the high-level segment of 1998 with a view to reaching a decision, if possible, during the 1997 substantive session, but not later than at a resumed session in the autumn (para. 53). After reaching a decision on the high-level theme, the Council may consider a preparatory process that could include entrusting the appropriate functional commission or appropriate body with the task of preparing for the next high-level segment.

5. Relationship between the United Nations and international finance and trade institutions

17. The Assembly and the governing bodies of the Bretton Woods institutions, based on the conclusions of the joint exploratory review (see para. 61 below), should consider concrete areas and forms of collaboration in the field of development-related activities (paras. 86 and 87).

18. The first high-level special meeting of the Council could be scheduled for spring of 1998. The high-level meeting could be in the form of an informal discussion with a senior-level panel selected, inter alia, among the Chairmen of the Interim Committee of the Board of Governors of the International Monetary Fund, the Development Committee of the World Bank, the Intergovernmental Group of Twenty-four on International Monetary Affairs (World Bank), and the Group of Ten (World Bank) (para. 88).

B. Implementation

1. Funding of operational activities for development of the United Nations system

19. In regard to the provision in Assembly resolution 50/227 that all aspects of funding of United Nations operational activities should be examined by the

Assembly and the Council in accordance with their respective mandates (para. 9), the reports of the Secretary-General (A/48/940 and A/49/834) included analytical assessments of the implications on operational activities for development of various funding mechanisms and offered proposals thereon. The report of the Secretary-General (E/1997/65/Add.1), in response to Council resolution 1996/42 and Assembly resolution 50/120, includes an analytical assessment of the implications on operational activities for development of the recent trends in core and non-core resources and also includes recommendations on how to increase core resources.

20. The Assembly requested the Council to consider, on an annual basis in the operational activities segment, the overall financial picture of the funds and programmes, including the availability of resources, the priorities and programmes agreed upon in the funds and programmes, the adopted targets and further guidance on priorities, and to make recommendations thereon to the Assembly and the funds and programmes. It also requested policy makers to engage in the broader issues for development cooperation (paras. 11 and 60).

21. Annual reports of the executive boards of United Nations funds and programmes include such assessments. The analytic report of the Secretary-General drawing the attention of the Council to policy issues prepared in consultation with the funds and programmes (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP) on issues arising from their executive boards, including the overall financial picture, is also available to the Council (E/1997/65/Add.5). The theme for the 1997 high-level segment of operational activities for development is funding for operational activities for development: implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/227.

22. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report on new and innovative ideas for generating funds, to be considered by the Assembly, on a priority basis, not later than at its fifty-first session, taking into account the discussions in the substantive session of 1996 of the Council (see Council resolutions 1996/42 and 1996/48).

23. The report of the Secretary-General (E/1997/65), in response to Council resolution 1996/42, includes such an assessment.

2. General Assembly

24. In its resolution 50/227, the Assembly encouraged the High-level Open-ended Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System to consider promoting the use of innovative mechanisms, in accordance with the rules of procedure of the Assembly (para. 19). The work of the Working Group is ongoing. However, at the fifty-first session of the Assembly, the Second Committee had two informal panel discussions and four interactive debates on topical issues involving agency representatives and experts. The topics covered included global economic trends and external debt, the review of Agenda 21, climate change, and development strategies. The Third committee held three dialogues with executive heads on drugs, refugees, and human rights. These informal sessions gave additional impetus to a more focused debate in the Committee.

25. The Secretary-General was requested to provide information on the total cost associated with the reports submitted annually to the General Assembly under current mandates, so that the General Assembly may review and take appropriate action on them (para. 20). The Council will have before it at its substantive session of 1997 a report on the matter and is expected to report to the Assembly subsequently.

26. The Assembly stated that there was a need to promote greater coherence and complementarity between the work of the Second and Third Committees (para. 21). At the fifty-first session of the Assembly, the Bureaux of the Second and Third Committees met to review their respective programmes of work in order to exchange information on the issues discussed in each, to identify potential areas of overlap or duplication, and to examine means of considering in a more coordinated manner issues related to the follow-up of the major United Nations conferences.

27. The Assembly also stated that there was a need to consider possible measures to allow for the coordinated consideration of the report of the Council during its session (para. 22). The report of the Economic and Social Council is currently considered in four of the Main Committees and in the Plenary. In this regard, consultations between the Bureau of the Council and the Bureaux of the Second and Third Committees took place to discuss the coordinated consideration of the report. Significant improvements have been made in the structure and presentation of the report of the Council to better assist the Assembly in its deliberations.

28. To the extent feasible according to resolution 50/227, the discussions in the Second and Third Committees should not commence until after the end of the general debate in the plenary meetings of the General Assembly (para. 23). The discussions in the Second and Third Committees commenced after the end of the general debate in the plenary meetings of the fifty-first session of the Assembly.

29. The Assembly suggested that, for issues of a procedural nature, decisions, instead of resolutions, should be used to the maximum extent possible. Resolutions should be shorter, in particular as regards preambular parts. The Bureaux, in reviewing the respective agendas, could identify and recommend those individual items or clusters of related items that could be effectively considered in omnibus resolutions (para. 24).

30. Compared to the fiftieth session, during the fifty-first session of the Assembly in the Second Committee, the number of resolutions adopted was reduced from 43 to 28. In almost all cases their length, in particular of preambular parts, was shortened. If resolutions were drafted one or two per agenda cluster, the number of resolutions could be reduced to about 14. This would lead to a better structured, focused and transparent negotiating process, with less dispersed informal meetings. The Third Committee adopted omnibus resolutions under the agenda items on narcotic drugs and follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women.

31. The Assembly also suggested that arrangements in the Assembly and in the Council for considering the coordination of humanitarian assistance and special

economic assistance to individual countries and regions should be reviewed during the fifty-first session of the General Assembly (para. 25). The Council will consider the sub-item entitled "Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance" for two meetings during its substantive session of 1997. The Assembly, in its resolution 51/194, welcomed the request to the Secretary-General by the Council in its resolution 1995/56 that a comprehensive analytical report be submitted to it at its substantive session of 1997.

32. In order to ensure a common approach and clear system-wide mandate for issues dealing with special economic assistance to individual countries, the Assembly recommended that each resolution could contain a common preambular section, while specificity (individual needs) would be maintained within a number of operative paragraphs (para. 26). This provision could come into effect at the fifty-second session of the Assembly.

33. To facilitate discussions based on an integrated approach to development issues, the Assembly stated the possibility of choosing a principal theme or themes should be explored to focus substantive debate under each "cluster" in the agenda without prejudice to the right of delegations to raise any other specific issue in the debates. Consultations should be held at an early stage, in an organizational session of the Committee, before the start of its general debate, based on proposals from the Bureau for decision, on clustering of the agenda (paras. 27 and 28). While efforts were made to further cluster the agenda in both Committees during the fifty-first session of the Assembly, further improvements could be made for the fifty-second session.

3. Documentation and related matters

34. As to the provision that the Secretariat and representatives of the specialized agencies provide executive briefings on the matters to be covered under the items on the agenda at least a week prior to the opening of the Assembly (para. 31), five briefings were organized by the United Nations Secretariat and agencies in relation to items on the agenda of the Second Committee (UNICEF, UNIDO, Habitat, UNESCO and UNCTAD). Other briefings were organized for the Third Committee by the Secretariat (United Nations Office at Vienna, UNICEF and the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development) on the subjects of narcotic drugs, crime prevention and criminal justice, the involvement of children in armed conflict, advancement of women and social development. The briefing by UNICEF on the mid-decade review of the World Summit for Children also related to the Third Committee's agenda. These briefings were considered useful.

35. In regard to the request that the Second Committee, in accordance with resolution 48/162, look early in the session into all aspects related to the improvement of the working methods of the Committee (para. 31), one week before the opening of the general debate in 1996 the Chairman of the Second Committee convened informal consultations to discuss ways to improve the working methods of the Committee. Aspects discussed included time limits for interventions, deadlines for submissions of resolutions under the various items, timely start of each meeting and proposed themes to focus interventions under clusters or subclusters of items, as well as informal briefings and panels parallel to the

Committee. As a standard part of its work programme the Third Committee held an informal meeting to discuss organizational issues and proposals for streamlining at the beginning of its session.

36. According to resolution 50/227, greater use should be made of relevant background documents in the Second Committee such as the World Economic and Social Survey, the Trade and Development Report, the World Development Report and the World Economic Outlook; in the preparation of the first two reports, cooperation and coordination between the Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis of the Secretariat and the secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) should be enhanced (para. 32).

37. The World Economic and Social Survey, and the World Development Report will be available for the high-level segment of the Council. With the announced consolidation of the three departments (Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis, and Department for Development Support and Management Services) and the establishment of the Executive Committee for Economic and Social Affairs, it is anticipated that the objectives of paragraph 32 will be attained more effectively.

38. In regard to the Assembly's request that continued improvement be made in order to make other reports more concise and action-oriented and that all documentation be provided within the specified timetables and page limits and in all official United Nations languages (para. 33), reports are increasingly responding to these recommendations and efforts continue to be made to have all documentation available in time and in electronic form.

39. As to the request that the Second and Third Committees consider procedural decisions regarding requests for reports, including where possible integrated reports on closely related items, as well as items to be inscribed on the agendas for the next sessions (para. 34), possibilities for consolidation of some of the reports that are requested every year should continue to be examined. Recommendations are contained in paragraphs 12-14 above.

40. Finally, as regards requests by both the Assembly and the Council for proposals to simplify existing reporting requirements, the Secretary-General has elaborated on this matter in detail in his progress report to the Assembly at its fiftieth session (A/50/697 and Corr.1, sect. F) and has reaffirmed the recommendations in his report to the Assembly at its fifty-first session (A/51/501, sect. C). As part of his reform initiatives, the Secretary-General has set a target of 25 per cent reduction in documentation to be achieved no later than the end of 1998.

4. Economic and Social Council

41. In the follow-up to United Nations conferences, the Assembly requested the Council to ensure the harmonization and coordination of the agendas and work programmes of the functional commissions by promoting a clearer division of labour among them and providing clear policy guidance to them. It suggested

that the Council could periodically organize meetings on specific issues to allow for more dialogue with the chairpersons and the secretariats, as appropriate, of the functional commissions, other subsidiary and related bodies and the relevant executive boards. If an effective and coordinated follow-up process suggests the need, then the consolidation of activities of subsidiary bodies may be considered (para. 39).

42. The report of the Secretary-General on the follow-up to Council's Agreed Conclusions 1996/1 (E/1997/58) addresses a harmonized and integrated approach to intergovernmental consideration of poverty eradication. The reports of the Secretary-General on mainstreaming of gender perspective and freshwater, including clean and safe water supply and sanitation will review the harmonization of the intergovernmental consideration of these issues. The second part of this request is being pursued in the context of the review of the Council's subsidiary bodies (see paras. 49-53 below).

43. The provision in Assembly resolution 50/227 that the Council hold a substantive session for four weeks in July (para. 40) has come into effect as of the substantive session of 1997.

44. Pursuant to the Assembly's request (para. 43), the Council will have before it at its substantive session of 1997 a study with a comprehensive assessment of the present arrangements for the Council's sessions.

45. According to resolution 50/227, the outcome of each segment of the Council should be strengthened and made more action-oriented, and resolutions, decisions and agreed conclusions should be implemented and followed up fully by all relevant parts of the United Nations system. This process should be monitored by the Council and the Assembly on a regular basis, as appropriate (para. 44).

46. The President of the Council may wish to bring the provisions to the attention of the Council at the commencement of the substantive session. The high-level segment is expected for the first time to end in agreed conclusions. The agreed conclusions adopted at the coordination segment are brought to the attention of the relevant functional commissions and organizations of the system, and a follow-up report is submitted to the Council.

47. In regard to the Council's high-level segment (see paras. 53-56 of resolution 50/227):

(a) A proposal for a theme for 1998 will be presented to the Council at its substantive session of 1997;

(b) The report of the Secretary-General (E/1997/67) includes all relevant issues to be discussed during the session and has made use of inputs from the various pertinent bodies of the United Nations system, including concrete recommendations;

(c) In order to better focus the policy dialogue, the secretariats of the United Nations, UNCTAD, the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization have contributed to the report;

(d) The outcome of the high-level segment is expected to be in the form of agreed conclusions and will be followed up by all relevant bodies and organizations of the United Nations system.

48. As to the agreed conclusions of the Council concerning the selection of cross-cutting themes common to major international conferences and/or the contribution to an overall review of the implementation of the programme of action of a United Nations conference (para. 57), the Council, by its decision 1996/310, decided that the themes for the coordination segment of its 1997 substantive session are as follows: "Mainstreaming of gender perspectives into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system" as the cross-sectoral theme and "Fresh water, including clean and safe water supply and sanitation" as the sectoral theme. The provision that the implementation of the agreed conclusions of this segment should be followed up in the general segment of the following year (para. 59) is being implemented as of the substantive session of 1997.

49. Pursuant to the Assembly's request that the Council should regularly review the agenda of its general segment with a view to discontinuing consideration of items that are not relevant to the work of its subsidiary machinery or are duplicative of items on the agenda of the Assembly (para. 67), the Council reviewed its agenda and decided to reorganize it to delete two items from the general segment. On 21 February, the Bureau of the Council met with the Chairpersons of the Second and Third Committees at the fifty-first session of the Assembly to discuss whether an overlap existed between the agendas of the Council and of the Second and Third Committees.

50. Further, the Council will have before it at its substantive session a document containing a consolidation of conclusions and recommendations of subsidiary bodies for consideration and action by the Council (para. 68).

5. Functional and regional commissions and expert groups

51. In its resolution 50/227, the Assembly requested the Council to undertake a review of the mandates, composition, functions and working methods of its functional commissions and expert groups and bodies. In the case of functional commissions with the primary responsibility for the follow-up and review of the implementation of a major conference, the Council was requested to ensure the coordination of their multi-year programmes, in accordance with the agreed conclusions adopted by the Council at its substantive session of 1995 on the coordinated follow-up of the results of major international conferences. Such a review is to be completed by the fifty-second session of the General Assembly (paras. 70 and 71).

52. Pursuant to the request in Council resolution 1996/41, the Secretary-General submitted a report compiling updated information on the establishment, terms of reference, membership and composition, term of office of members, reporting procedure and frequency of meetings of subsidiary bodies of the Council and the Assembly in the economic, social and related fields (E/1996/97). Further information on the working methods of the functional commissions and expert groups of the Council was also presented (E/1996/97/Add.1). The Bureau

of the Council has initiated informal consultations in preparation of the review during the substantive session.

53. The Assembly also requested that the role and the working methods of the Committee for Programme and Coordination should be considered by the High-level Open-ended Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System (para. 73). At the time of submission of this report the work of the Working Group was ongoing.

54. In accordance with resolution 50/227, the Council is to provide for the review of the regional commissions, with a view to strengthening and enhancing their effectiveness as action- and policy-oriented bodies in the economic and development fields with better response to the conditions and environments unique to the specific regions; improving their coordination with the entire United Nations system, including the specialized agencies, the Bretton Woods institutions and the regional development banks; strengthening their active participation relating to the implementation at the regional level of the results of major United Nations conferences; and shall encourage them also to undertake their own management and functional assessments towards these ends. One of the major purposes of the reviews is to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of these bodies by eliminating unnecessary duplication and by ensuring a better structural relationship among these bodies and with the Council (paras. 74 and 75).

55. The Council, in its resolution 1996/41, requested the regional commissions to continue undertaking their own reviews, as called for in Assembly resolution 50/227 and to report to the Council at its substantive session of 1997. The Council also decided to take a decision at that session concerning further action on how to achieve the objectives set out in paragraphs 74 and 75 of annex I to Assembly resolution 50/227, taking into account the above-mentioned reviews (E/1997/5 and E/1997/40 and Add.1).

6. Inter-agency coordination

56. In the context of the discussions on an agenda for development, the Assembly requested that a close review be made of the relationship of the Council with the specialized agencies (para. 79). That topic is under consideration in the Ad Hoc Working Group of the General Assembly on An Agenda for Development.

57. Pursuant to the request of the Assembly in regard to the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) (para. 81), the report of ACC (E/1997/54) gives information on the work of the three inter-agency task forces and on the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development and the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality, and identifies policy and coordination issues to be addressed by the Council and the Assembly.

58. The Assembly requested that the periodic meetings of all concerned senior secretariat officials in the economic and social sectors, under the authority of the Secretary-General, should continue to be used to improve coordination and

performance and that the outcomes of these meetings should be presented on a regular basis to the Council (para. 82).

59. The Secretary-General chairs the Policy Coordination Group, made up of Heads of Departments and Offices within the Secretariat as well as the heads of United Nations funds and programmes. Secondly, all United Nations departments, offices, funds and programmes have been grouped in four principal sectoral areas: peace and security, humanitarian affairs, economic and social affairs, and development operations (see A/51/829). The overall aim of the establishment of these new mechanisms is to involve all entities of the United Nations, and the resulting cohesion will, inter alia, be evident in the reports to the Assembly and the Council.

7. Relationship between the United Nations and the international finance and trade institutions

60. Pursuant to the request in resolution 50/227, the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Assembly is seized of the question of the strengthening of the relationship between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization (para. 84).

61. The Joint Exploratory Review called for in paragraphs 86 and 87 of annex I to resolution 50/227, the purpose of which is to assess mechanisms, programmes and relationships at the field, headquarters and intergovernmental levels, is currently being conducted by the United Nations (led by the UNDP Administrator in collaboration with United Nations departments, funds and programmes), in cooperation with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. A report on the status of the review will be submitted to the Council at its 1997 substantive session and the Assembly at its fifty-second session. Action to implement this provision should follow the above-mentioned review.

62. In order to improve communication and cooperation at the intergovernmental level between the Council and the international financial and trade institutions, the Assembly requested the Council to schedule periodically a high-level special meeting at a time proximate to the semi-annual meetings of the Bretton Woods institutions (para. 88). The Council, by resolution 1996/43 requested the Secretary-General to consult the heads of the financial institutions by early 1997 in order to explore the possibilities and practical modalities of scheduling such a meeting. In February 1997, the Secretary-General made suggestions to the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund and the President of the World Bank on the organization of the meeting. Consultations have been continuing with a view to exploring the possibility of convening the high-level special meeting in the spring of 1998.

8. Secretariat

63. The Assembly requested that the present structure and functioning of the Secretariat, including the economic and social departments and the question of establishing a post of Deputy Secretary-General for International Cooperation and Development, be considered in the High-level Open-ended Working Group on the

Strengthening of the United Nations System and in the Open-ended Working Group on an Agenda for Development (para. 89). It also requested the High-level Open-ended Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System to consider uniform and maximum terms of service for heads of programmes and funds and other Council and Assembly bodies (para. 90).

64. At the time of submission of this report the work of the High-level Open-ended Working Group was ongoing. The Secretary-General announced his decision on 17 March 1997 to merge the three Secretariat Departments in the economic and social areas into a single department (see A/51/829).

III. EXECUTIVE BOARDS OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME/UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND, THE UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND AND THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME

65. Paragraphs 76 through 78 of annex I to Assembly resolution 50/227 contain provisions for the governing bodies of the United Nations programmes and funds. In paragraph 76 the Assembly requested that the executive boards consider adjustments to their agendas, reporting procedures and format, and that they review the number and scheduling of meetings and sessions, with a view to continuing the rationalization of the working methods of the boards. In paragraph 77 the Assembly asked the governing bodies to describe in their reports how the overall policy guidance and coordination provided by the Assembly and the Council had been implemented, and to give specific recommendations for further action. In paragraph 78 the Assembly requested that the effective participation of observer Member States and observer States in the sessions of the executive boards be facilitated and that the arrangements, working methods and rules of procedure be reviewed. The following paragraphs summarize the efforts made by the executive boards to respond to these recommendations.

A. Number and scheduling of meetings and sessions

66. The UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board has held its first regular session (13-17 January), its second regular session (10-14 March) and its annual session (12-23 May). The third regular session is scheduled for 15-19 September. The Board holds informal meetings, briefings and consultations between and during sessions to deal with difficult issues, thereby facilitating formal discussions at the sessions. The Executive Board has kept its long-standing tradition of reaching consensus on all decisions.

67. At its third regular session of 1996, the UNICEF Executive Board discussed the scheduling of its 1997 sessions, with several delegations suggesting that the number of regular sessions be reduced from three to two, eliminating the session scheduled for March. The Board agreed to shorten the second regular session to two days and will again address the subject when deciding on its 1998 programme of work. The Executive Board has a long-standing tradition of reaching consensus on all decisions. To save time, most decisions are arrived at through informal negotiations between interested delegations, without

resorting to formal drafting sessions requiring interpretation and other conference services.

68. Since the launch of the Management Excellence Programme in 1995, the UNICEF secretariat has convened a series of inter-sessional and informal meetings on progress made in order to benefit from the guidance of Board members. In addition to management excellence, the meetings have covered a wide range of issues of particular concern to Board members. By providing information and promoting dialogue, these informal meetings facilitated discussion and decision-making during formal sessions.

69. The secretariats of UNICEF and UNDP consult about the scheduling of the two Executive Boards' sessions, which usually take place consecutively in order to avoid overlap. The secretariat has begun to schedule the pre-Board information meetings some weeks before each session to allow more time for follow-up consultation between New York delegations and their capitals and between delegations and the secretariat.

70. The WFP Executive Board agreed at its third regular session of 1996 to the following pattern of meetings with a view to enhancing efficient and effective governance:

(a) Formal Executive Board's sessions composed of annual session, regular sessions and resumed and/or ad hoc sessions of the Board;

(b) Consultations on resources (in principle, twice a year);

(c) Open-ended information meetings preceding each formal session of the Board;

(d) Meetings of the Executive Board's working groups.

B. Agendas and organization of work

71. For the first time, in January 1997, the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board adopted a work plan for the whole year, with a more defined specialization of its sessions (organizational matters, thematic discussions; strategic and policy-making documents and budgetary and financial matters).

72. In 1997, the UNICEF Executive Board has some 33 items on its programme of work for the year, organized into one annual (2-6 June) and three regular sessions (20-24 January, 18-19 March and 9-12 September). The Board agreed on the assignment of the agenda items at its third regular session of 1996, on the basis of clustering of related items.

73. The Bureau of the WFP Executive Board, in consultation with the Executive Director, may amend the provisional agenda for the forthcoming sessions provided in the programme of work for the subsequent year. At its third regular session of 1996, the Executive Board decided as a general principle that the programme of work for the following year, together with the sequence and tentative

schedule of sessions, pre-session briefings and of its working groups (if any were established), would be approved at its last regular session of each year.

C. Participation of observers

74. The UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board discussions normally do not include written statements and are characterized by a spirit of dialogue, in which members and observers participate.

75. As required by Assembly resolution 48/162 and the Rules of Procedure of the UNICEF Executive Board, observer delegations have the right of participation in all formal and informal meetings and, on indication in the United Nations Documents Distribution List, receive all documentation.

76. Members of FAO or the United Nations who are not members of the WFP Executive Board are notified of forthcoming sessions of the Board and are invited upon request to attend the annual session of the Board as observers. Those members who express a special interest would also be invited, upon request, to attend regular sessions of the Board as observers. In addition, representatives of appropriate United Nations bodies would be invited to all sessions of the Board. Other organizations with a special interest may be invited, upon request, to attend sessions of the Board.

D. Reporting and documentation

77. At its third regular session of 1996, the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board adopted decision 96/45 on documentation which, inter alia, established strict page limits for documents to be submitted to the Executive Board and decided, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/206, that documents must be submitted to the Office of Conference and Support Services 10 weeks before the start of the session.

78. The UNICEF secretariat is working continuously to improve the use of time during each session and, in consultation with the Board and Bureau, is working to rationalize the reports presented at each session. In keeping with Assembly resolutions 50/11 and 50/206, page limits and deadlines for documents have been established and, with few exceptions, are met by the secretariat. In addition, the Board and secretariat have established an e-mail list server to facilitate communication between the secretariat and delegations. The secretariat is in the process of establishing an Internet site, accessible to delegations using a password, to post copies of official documentation, again in keeping with the Board's decisions.

79. Documentation prepared by the secretariat for the WFP Executive Board will be kept brief and decision-oriented and will include, where applicable, elements of draft decisions requested of the Board, and reference to WFP focal point officers. At the end of the session, a paper containing all decisions and/or recommendations is provided to Board representatives for verification. A brief summary of the discussion will be prepared by the Rapporteur, to be endorsed by

the Board at its first subsequent session. Documentation of the Executive Board should be available upon request, to any member of WFP.

80. Since the 1996 third regular session, all Board documents are posted on the WFP Internet website when available in all the Board's official languages, with an access password available to all WFP membership. An open-ended training course clustered by language was organized for that purpose last March. Page limits were set in 1996 for different categories of documents, and efforts continue to be made to standardize formats that facilitate the reading.

E. Rules of procedure

81. The working group on rules of procedure for the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board, established at the end of 1996, completed its review of new rules of procedure in February for submission to the annual session of the Board for adoption.

82. Immediately following the adoption of Assembly resolution 48/162, the UNICEF Executive Board revised its Rules of Procedure to take account of the resolution's provisions.

83. The WFP Executive Board at its first regular session of 1996 agreed to use the rules provided by Assembly resolution 48/162 and, when insufficient, to apply the Rules of Procedure of the former governing body, the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes. The Executive Board will revise the resulting Rules of Procedure as it deems necessary and useful with a view to codifying them after a suitable period of operation.

84. In addition to the powers conferred upon the President of the Board by the Rules of Procedure, the Board decided that:

(a) Pro forma statements and prepared speeches from members of the Board should be discouraged. If a special guest is invited to address the Board, he/she should make a contribution to a specific agenda item;

(b) The debate shall be confined to the question before the Executive Board, and the President may propose a limitation on the time to be allowed to representatives and to the Secretariat for providing answers/clarification.